

American

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Vice President Biden Begins Seven-Day Visit to China, Mongolia, Japan

By MacKenzie C. Babb | Staff Writer

Washington — Vice President Biden has kicked off a weeklong trip to China, Mongolia and Japan, where he will engage Asian leaders in talks on a broad range of bilateral, regional and global issues, the White House says.

“The vice president’s trip is a reflection of our belief that the United States is a Pacific power whose interests are inextricably linked with Asia’s economic, security and political order,” said Antony Blinken, Biden’s senior national security adviser. Blinken outlined the vice president’s schedule in a White House briefing on the trip August 15.

He said Biden will start his trip with a four-day visit to China at the invitation of Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping, marking the first in a series of planned reciprocal visits between the two vice presidents announced during Chinese President Hu Jintao’s state visit to Washington earlier in 2011. While the visit is Biden’s first as vice president, he visited the country several times as a U.S. senator.

Blinken said the trip reflects the Obama administration’s investment in the future of the U.S.-China relationship. Daniel Russell, the senior director for Asian affairs at the National Security Council, said Biden is expected to discuss a range of security, economic and human rights issues with Chinese leaders.

Biden is scheduled to meet with President Hu, Vice President Xi and Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao in Beijing, where he will also speak to business leaders. Biden will then travel with Xi, the eighth vice president of the People’s Republic of China, to the southwestern city of Chengdu in Sichuan province, where the United States has a consulate. He will address university students, meet with provincial government officials and visit a local secondary school before leaving for Mongolia.

Blinken said Biden’s August 22 visit to Mongolia’s capital city, Ulaanbaatar, is a “truly historic visit,” as it is the first trip by a U.S. vice president to the country in more than 60 years. He said the country “offers an important example of a successful transition to a strong democracy and a partner with whom we’re expanding cooperation in a broad variety of diplomatic, economic and defense areas.”

He said the stop there is a reflection of a broad effort “to engage emerging powers as a way to build a secure, prosperous and democratic Asia.” Mongolia has been

praised by U.S. leaders for its democratic transition following the Cold War. It will take over chairmanship of the Community of Democracies later in 2011.

While in Mongolia, Biden will meet with President Tsakhia Elbegdorj and Prime Minister Sukhbaatar Batbold to discuss U.S.-Mongolia diplomatic, defense and security cooperation. Russell said the leaders will also talk about strengthening cooperation on nuclear nonproliferation, peacekeeping and human rights issues.

Biden will then head to Japan for two days, a trip to underscore the “tremendous strength and great importance of the U.S.-Japan alliance,” Russell said. The trip “serves to demonstrate how much we care about our friends,” as Biden will spend a significant part of his time there surveying the country’s progress in rebuilding from the devastating March 11 earthquake, tsunami and subsequent nuclear emergency.

The vice president will meet in Tokyo with Prime Minister Naoto Kan to discuss regional security issues, military cooperation in Afghanistan and the global economic recovery. He will also visit the northeastern city of Sendai, where he will thank American forces stationed there for the role they played in helping their Japanese counterparts in the aftermath of the earthquake. The vice president will leave for Washington August 24.

The three-nation trip is part of the Obama administration’s efforts to “renew and intensify the U.S. role in Asia,” Blinken said. Obama will host the 19th annual meeting of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum in Honolulu November 12-13, where he will likely meet with Chinese President Hu. They will meet again during the annual Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Summit in Bali November 17-19, and at the immediately following East Asia Summit.

U.S., Chinese Economies Bound by Ties of Commerce, Investment

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr. | Staff Writer

Washington — When President Obama met with China’s President Hu Jintao in Washington earlier this year, they reaffirmed a commitment to building a positive, cooperative and comprehensive relationship. A crucial component of that relationship is trade in which each economy helps to strengthen the other.

“We’re now exporting more than \$100 billion a year in goods and services to China, which supports more than half a million American jobs,” Obama said at a January 19 joint press conference with Hu in Washington. “In fact, our exports to China are growing nearly twice as fast as our exports to the rest of the world, making it a key part of my goal of doubling American exports and keeping

America competitive in the 21st century.”

The strengthening of this relationship comes to the forefront when Vice President Biden arrives in Beijing August 17 for a five-day visit as the guest of Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping. U.S. officials say that a significant purpose of the trip is to discuss security and economic issues and to get to know China’s future leadership.

Biden will also visit Mongolia to discuss democratic reforms and visit Japan to offer continued support in the wake of the deadly earthquake and tsunami earlier this year.

Obama said that while the economic relationship has benefited the United States, it has also benefited China. He noted that China’s economic growth has lifted hundreds of millions of people out of poverty – a tribute to the Chinese people. The growth has been helped by decades of stability in Asia, Obama said, which was made possible by America’s forward presence in the region, strong trade relations with the United States, and an open international economic system.

According to a March U.S. Congressional Research Service (CRS) analysis, the U.S. and Chinese economies are the first and second largest in the world, though the U.S. economy is three times larger than China’s. China’s economy has become a significant driver of global economic growth, and it also has become an important economic hub for Asia.

The CRS analysis also notes that while China is the United States’ second-largest trading partner, Chinese imports into the United States make up 19 percent of all U.S. imports. The country is the third-largest market for U.S. exports, and it is the second-largest export market for U.S. agricultural products.

In 2010, bilateral trade in goods totaled \$457 billion, with U.S. imports from China totaling \$365 billion and U.S. exports to China totaling \$92 billion. By comparison, in 1979 total U.S.-China trade was \$2 billion. In trade in services, the United States runs a surplus with China, with exports to China of \$16 billion in 2008 (the latest year for which statistics are available) and imports from China valued at \$10 billion, according to the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative.

“Because of the size of the two economies, the bilateral economic relationship and the economic decisions of both countries have a profound impact on the global economy,” the CRS analysis says.

One area where the two nations have cooperated extensively is in addressing the recent global financial crisis, both bilaterally and through the Group of 20

advanced economies.

“When President Obama and I took office in January of 2009 we understood – we understood absolutely clearly that our relationship with China would be a key priority,” Biden said at the opening session of the U.S.-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue on May 9 in Washington.

“The president and I were determined to set the relationship on a stable course that could be sustained for decades,” Biden added.

Biden also noted that the United States and China are linked by more than commerce. He said the two peoples have become increasingly linked through education, work and travel.

Secretary Clinton: Enforcement of Universal Rights Should Be Shared

By Stephen Kaufman | Staff Writer

Washington – The United States wants to encourage other nations to enforce “a universal set of values and interests” such as freedom, human rights and democracy, says Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, and she pointed to the Arab participation in international operations to help the Libyan people end Muammar Qadhafi’s brutal 42-year reign as an example of “exactly the kind of world that I want to see.”

Speaking at the National Defense University in Washington August 16 with Defense Secretary Leon Panetta, Clinton said the U.S. use of “smart power” means working with more nations to uphold universal values, as opposed to having only the options of “brute force” or unilateralism in response to global challenges.

“The United States stands for our values, our interests and our security, but ... we have a very clear view that others need to be taking the same steps to enforce a universal set of values and interests,” she said.

Clinton said member nations of NATO have been joined by Arab nations in an active response against Qadhafi’s violent repression of Libyans calling for greater freedoms and political openness.

“For the first time we have a NATO-Arab alliance taking action. You’ve got Arab countries who are running strike actions. You’ve got Arab countries who are supporting, with advisers, the opposition. This is exactly the kind of world that I want to see, where it’s not just the United States,” Clinton said.

Secretary Panetta said the combination of the NATO and Arab forces, international sanctions against the Qadhafi

regime, diplomatic pressure from the Arab League, and the actions of the Libyan opposition have worked together and been “very helpful in moving this in the right direction,” adding that “the sense is that Qadhafi’s days are numbered.”

Opposition forces are moving toward the capital, Tripoli, from both the east and the west sides. Panetta said that Qadhafi’s forces are weakened, as evidenced by recent senior defections from his regime.

Clinton called for international cooperation to respond to the violent suppression of Syrian demonstrators by Bashar al-Assad’s government, saying Syria’s neighbors can have greater influence over the Assad regime’s actions than the United States, which has had troubled relations with Syria for decades.

The United States is pushing for more sanctions to pressure the regime to end its violence and is assembling “a very careful set of actions and statements that will make our views very clear; and to have other voices, particularly from the region ... is essential for there to be any impact within Syria,” she said.

Clinton has previously called upon countries with closer ties to the Assad regime to impose sanctions on Syria’s oil and gas industry and end arms sales to the Syrian government.

“We don’t have very much going on with Syria because of a long history of challenging problems with them,” and it is “not news” if the United States says the Assad regime must go, she said. “But if Turkey says it, if [Saudi Arabia’s] King Abdullah says it, if other people say it, there is no way the Assad regime can ignore it.”

The Obama administration has said that more than 2,000 people have been killed by the regime since March, and Clinton says the situation there is galvanizing world opinion against the Assad regime. The recent condemnations of the regime’s actions by the Arab League, the Gulf Cooperation Council, Saudi Arabia and Turkey have added to “a growing international chorus of condemnation,” she said.

The United States has worked with other countries to establish “the credibility and, frankly, the universality” of the global condemnation, Clinton said, adding, “That may actually make a difference” in Syria.

Asian in America: New Smithsonian Exhibition Explores Identity

By Brittany Bybee | Staff Writer

Washington — What does it mean to be Asian-American? In a new exhibition that opened August 12 and runs

through October 14, 2012, the Smithsonian Institution explores the complex issue of identity among the members of this culturally diverse group.

The Smithsonian’s National Portrait Gallery and Asian Pacific American Program collaborated to present a showcase of contemporary Asian-American portraiture that explores transnational identity, diversity and inclusion in the United States.

“Portraiture Now: Asian American Portraits of Encounter is a provocative show that affirms the complex realities of Asian identity in today’s culture,” said Martin Sullivan, director of the National Portrait Gallery.

Through the work of seven artists, the exhibition offers thought-provoking stories of the Asian-American experience and challenges common stereotypes.

The artists, who themselves represent the diversity of Asian Americans, use concepts of migration and transnationalism to interpret what it means to be Asian-American.

Roger Shimomura, a third-generation American of Japanese descent, spent his career as a college professor fighting stereotypes through art. He challenges Disney, Hello Kitty and Pikachu characters throughout his self-portraits.

Korean artist Hye Yeon Nam hopes her audience finds connections between her work and their lives. Her short videos contrast women in Korea and women in the United States by exploring everyday activities. Using humor and warmth, she addresses feelings of awkwardness in common activities, such as eating, drinking and walking.

Fine-art photographer CYJO, who was born in Seoul, raised in the United States and now resides in Beijing, shows a collection of photographs of Korean Americans. From public figures to average citizens, portraits line the hallway of the gallery, as more than 240 individuals reflect on their ancestral culture. At first glance, they look similar, but with a second look, it is clear that each person has an exceptional story.

Other artists in the exhibition include Hong Chun Zhang, a Chinese-born artist who references her identity through images of her family’s hair, and Shizu Saldamando, born to parents of Japanese and Mexican descent, who incorporates the music that influenced her identity while growing up in Southern California.

Artist Tam Tran’s photographs illustrate the changing relationship she has with her identity. From the time she was a young girl in South Vietnam to her family’s move

to Memphis, she struggled with two overlapping cultures. Finally, Satomi Shirai's detailed photographs document her relocation to New York City after leaving Japan.

During an August 9 preview, Konrad Ng, director of the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Program, said he believes the show "provides symbols for what it means to be Asian-American." He added that he sees the exhibition as an affirmation of identity and inclusion in the United States as it honors Asian Americans and their contributions to U.S. society and culture.

"The audience will come away from the show with a better understanding of Asian Americans and diversity," Ng said.

As the viewer moves from room to room, it becomes clear that no two artists have had the same experience. Charcoal strands of black hair contrast with childhood cartoons while exotic self-portraits and video of spilled orange juice illustrate that each artist interprets and values his or her Asian-American identity in a distinct way, and each has found a place in U.S. society through art.

"Asian American Portraits of Encounter provides engaging points of view that will enrich the understanding of Asian Pacific America," Ng said. "These exceptional works are portals into the souls of the American experience, world cultures and their intersections."

The Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Program aims to provide vision, leadership and support for Asian and Pacific Islander American initiatives to better reflect their contributions to the American experience and world culture.

The Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery seeks to tell the history of the United States through the individuals who have shaped its culture. Using visual arts, performing arts and new media, the gallery portrays poets and presidents, visionaries and villains, and actors and activists whose lives tell the American story.

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